

**Sermon, St Andrew's**  
**Ephesians 4.1-16, John 6.24-35, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021**

*O Almighty God, help us, we pray, through Thy Word and Sacrament, in the power of Thy Spirit, to grow up into the likeness of Thy Beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

This Epistle is beautiful, a wonderful vision and pattern: for our individual life, for our church, and for our society, country and world - for conscience, community and Kingdom.

When we succeed, our in our individual or collective life, it is when we look a little like this pattern - and, when we fall short (alone or together), it is often against this standard. Can people honestly say of us “see how those Christians love one another”?

The world desperately needs more humility, gentleness and patience - from individuals, in communities (including churches), in politics, between countries - in our attitude to those most in need: are we a mature, loving country?

The Epistle rightly reminds us that mature individuals, communities and society should not be misled by trickery or deceit by those in positions of authority, or blown about by fashions or superficially easy, populist teaching, whether in our personal, religious or national life. The purpose of our individual and collective spiritual development is not just to build up the Church, but to mature and perfect each of us and our society in the image of Christ - not immature, childish, but complete: able to discuss disagreement without wounding, dividing - but in love: when all our different gifts and qualities are enabled to contribute to the flourishing of the whole. We have of course recently seen a national sports team growing together - imperfect, but maturing: a work in progress...

What should we be aiming at, what should our full maturity look like? Like Christ: His stablished, strengthened, settled, secure and confident identity: His wisdom, peace, healing; His character, passion + compassion; His truth, service and sacrifice; His prayer, silence, Spirit; His faith, His hope, and His love, in God, for us all. How are we to do these things, to grow spiritually - each of us, and collectively? Of course, if we are to grow, we must be fed. What feeds each of us spiritually (perhaps a varied diet!) - what feeds our Church, and our country, to build us all up toward spiritual maturity? St Paul is often at his best when closest to the Gospels - and here he seems perhaps closest to St John's account, particularly those parts where Christ uses organic metaphors of life and growth - being rooted and grounded in Christ, nurtured and nourished by His Spirit, growing up toward the Light which is the Father. Our Gospel helps us with our Epistle this morning - how are we to grow up into Christ's likeness? For a start, believe in Him; come to Him - and be fed by Him. "You are what you eat": one beautiful Advent Collect invites us to "read, mark and inwardly digest" God's Holy Word - Christ, and our Bible. We can be fed by Him when we open His book - often with some lectionary that guides us in selecting regular readings - and in the Bread we are offered at the Altar rail: and, currently, in our pews, and in Spirit at home. So then, we are fed spiritually by the Word which is Christ and our Bible, by the living Bread which is Christ - and by finding Him in our neighbour. Our soul, our Church and our community are all built up when we learn to see Christ in each other - perhaps even, if we are given such grace, that others may see Him in us, too. St Jerome wrote "if you cannot find Christ in the beggar at your door, you will not find Him in the chalice at the Altar".

We are enabled to grow individually and collectively by being fed in Word and Sacrament, and good neighbourliness - one great challenge of “lock down” has been trying to keep us all nourished in these three ways, amid all our “sorts and conditions” of isolation, busyness, or great weariness. When we cannot receive the Sacrament in person, or are starved of companionship, there is always His Word - these three aspects of our spiritual diet work together to build us all up in Christ, and all three are rarely unavailable at once. Both Epistles and Gospels point back to the long history of God nourishing us from the beginning, and particularly to the Israelites crossing the wilderness, being fed with bread from Heaven - an image I used at the start of “lock down”, and return to now. Today is also traditionally *Lammis* or Loaf-Mass, when the first fruits of the harvest were baked and offered as a thanksgiving - a foretaste of Harvest, and a reminder that we are also continually fed and nourished by God through His Creation. Let us pray this morning, then, for our continued nourishing, in Word, Sacrament and community, in order to help our spiritual maturing in love, as individuals, as the Church, and as a country, continent and civilisation - until “The kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our God, and of His Christ” - and “God is all, in all”.

*In the Love of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,*  
**AMEN.**

*Some hymns on my heart for these readings:*

Thy Hand, O God, has guided Thy flock from age to age...

Guide me O Thou great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land

I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above...